

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
August 15, 2001**

The regular meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on August 15, 2001, in Room 1D2 of the Transportation Building in Olympia, Washington.

Commissioners present were: Connie Niva, Ed Barnes, Aubrey Davis, Elmira Forner, George Kargianis, A. Michèle Maher, and Chris Marr.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Commissioner Barnes, and seconded by Commissioner Davis, to approve the minutes of the July 19, 2001 Commission meeting. The motion was approved unanimously.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY REPORTS

Secretary MacDonald commented that staff is very supportive of the Commission's new organization and direction for the next year. He also commented that there has been a lot of interest from constituents in the new organizational form of the Department. He stated that he intends for people in the agency to work beyond the lines and boxes in an organizational chart, but that the organization chart is sending a clear message about how the agency will be doing business in the future. The Department will focus on delivery of the programs and projects. It will give attention to all modes of transportation, and will be oriented towards customer service. He reported that he briefed Paul Isaki, the Governor's Chief of Staff, on the new organization design, and that Mr. Isaki thought the design was appropriate.

Secretary MacDonald stated that the August 7th retreat with the Commission was very helpful, and that individuals within the Department are already working on the presentation materials for improved communication with the public. His goal is to talk about the program and obtain support for that program, rather than simply ask for more money. He reported on his visit with the Tri-Cities business community as an example. He and Commissioner Maher met with the community and also delivered a rural mobility grant check to Benton Franklin Transit. The grant award gave him an opportunity to discuss the rural mobility program and the benefits it provides to communities around the state. He pointed out that a vote to increase tax support of Benton Franklin Transit failed by only 200 votes – and predicted that an upcoming vote in Snohomish County would also be close. He commented that the drivers of single-occupant vehicles should be supporting transit, since any increase in transit ridership results in more capacity available in the general-purpose lanes.

Secretary MacDonald reported on the causes and results of the traffic problems in the Everett area the previous Monday evening. The Department closed SR 529 to work

on the bridge, and did not anticipate the impact of doing that at the same time construction was proceeding on SR 2. He indicated that the agency is reviewing what happened and using the experience to learn how to perform better in the future. Commissioner Marr suggested that the Department develop a communication tool that addresses what is going to be done and why, given that the public often has the same basic questions and suggestions about construction projects and traffic management no matter what the project. Secretary MacDonald indicated that the Department is working on improving the AM 530 radio construction advisory messages, and also responding to complaints and suggestions through emails. He stated that the Department is also considering linking into other employer-based web sites to expand the communication opportunities for commuters. Commissioners commented on other successful communication efforts around closures, and suggested additional ways to improve communications, including using signs rather than just the radio station, and communicating with trucks at the weigh stations or on their radio systems. Later in the day, John Okamoto, Assistant Secretary for Northwest Washington, provided further explanation regarding the SR 529 construction and traffic congestion, and indicated that he and John Conrad, Assistant Secretary for Engineering and Regional Operations, would be examining four recent case studies to determine why traditional methods of communication are not sufficient and what changes need to be made to the Department's methods of delivering information to the traveling public.

Secretary MacDonald noted that the Department is working on the question regarding how to keep the major corridor projects moving forward given the current law budget for 01-03. He stated that it was not the intention of the Legislature to close the projects, and reminded the Commission that it has the authority to program the projects within the program budget appropriations.

COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner Davis commented on the radio interview of Secretary MacDonald and Bob Williams of the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, held on KIRO Radio with Dave Ross. He stated that he found Secretary MacDonald's responses to be very effective. He reported that King County is organizing a process for discussing TEA 21, and suggested that the Department contact County Executive Ron Sims as soon as possible to engage the county in the statewide effort. He also mentioned to the Commission that he wants the Commission to consider programming additional money for the Trans-Lake project, since the appropriation under the current budget will run out in October. He also shared with the Commission his views on the distribution of expenditures of state gas tax revenues compared to the geographical sources of those revenues. He stated that, in his opinion, if the state is not able to obtain additional funding, the state should look at reallocating money geographically. Commissioner Niva pointed out that King County would not be able to solve its transportation problems simply by keeping the gas tax revenue generated within the county. Commission Kargianis commented that the current situation reflects the fact that the whole state has needs and the revenue must be obtained to meet those needs. Commissioner Davis closed his remarks by stating that when the final project list is considered for approval, the

Department should state how the expenditures in the list compare to the revenue sources, so the Commission can consider the information.

Commissioner Maher reported that she attended a meeting in the Tri-Cities area with Secretary MacDonald. She also is participating in a newly formed committee in Spokane to work on the light rail issue. She distributed an article that demonstrates how Canada is moving forward on freight and trade supportive infrastructure improvements, which will create more intense competition for Washington ports and industries.

Commissioner Barnes recommended that Secretary MacDonald share information with the Board of Directors for the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, rather than simply sharing the information with Bob Williams. He urged the Commission and the Department to work closely with both the Washington and Oregon congressional delegations to obtain additional funding for projects. He reported that the Bi-State I-5 Corridor Committee is working hard to finish its plans so that it will be eligible for TEA 21 funding. He indicated that he would like the Commission's Vancouver local area meeting to include a tour of the airport extension of the light rail system and the route to the downtown area. He distributed two articles from newspapers, one advocating keeping a statewide transportation system rather than dividing the state into regions, the other commenting on traffic congestion and its solutions.

Commissioner Forner reported that she attended a very constructive meeting regarding the East Wenatchee by-pass. She also participated in a conference co-sponsored by the Council of State Governments and the Pacific Northwest Economic Region. She summarized the key findings of the conference, including the need for the states to plan and fund projects in a cooperative fashion at a multi-state level, instead of focusing on dividing states into sub-regions. She stated that the conference clearly showed that states that do not address their transportation issues would lose ground economically. She asked that the Commission have a presentation from Matt Morrison, Director of PNWER, on the efforts of that group regarding the reauthorization of TEA 21. Commissioner Forner reported that she met with individuals from the Transportation Planning Office, and found it to be very useful. She found a great deal of support for rural transportation and economic needs within the plan, but believes that it is not clear to individuals in the rural communities as they read the plan. She suggested to staff that they rephrase parts of the plan to make it clear what the plan offers those areas.

Commissioner Kargianis reported that the following day the I-405 Executive Committee would meet to select a preliminary preferred alternative. The project has heard from one coalition that is opposing the preferred alternative. He indicated that he would be meeting with the coalition very soon. He also reported that he has been talking with legislators and other community leaders about the need to pursue a statewide approach to transportation.

Commissioner Niva reported that the City of Everett was pursuing a project that

had received its approval by the appropriate environmental agency, but an opposition group is suing the agency in an effort to stop the project. She commented that this case could set a precedent for Department projects. She also reported that she met with the Governor's Chief of Staff, Paul Isaki, to discuss the Commission's work plan and the fact that the Commission would be increasing its efforts to improve accountability and oversight for the Department. She also communicated to him the Commission's interest providing opportunities for the Governor to interact with the Commission.

Commissioner Marr commented that shortly after the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation completed its work, the Governor asked the Transportation Commission to undertake establishing benchmarks and a reporting system. Now that the 2001 legislative session is over, the Commission should formalize its intention to address the accountability issue and move forward. He proposed that a letter be sent to the Governor acknowledging that although the revenue debate is still pending, the Commission intends to move forward in the areas of accountability and efficiency. The letter should articulate the Commission's plan of action. The Commission members agreed to Commissioner Marr's proposal. Chris Rose, the Commission Administrator, will draft a letter for review by the Commission officers.

Commissioner Marr reported that he has been involved with the Spokane Citizen's Committee on Local Street Funding. He stated that the Commission and Department should be involved in the issue of how to improve the ability of local governments to fund the preservation and improvement of the local streets and roads. He further indicated that the Commission would be receiving a briefing from the Committee at its Spokane local area meeting in September. Commissioner Marr commented that Mr. Rose would be providing more complete, written information to local area meeting presenters in an effort to improve the focus of the meetings. Commissioner Marr reported that he was working with Jerry Lenzi, Eastern Region Administrator, on preparations for the August 22nd groundbreaking for the North Spokane Corridor project. He also informed the Commission that the Eastern Region is installing its traffic management center. Commissioner Marr concluded his remarks by reporting that he met with Mr. Rose the previous Friday to establish expectations and communication methods for the Commission Office. He stated that Mr. Rose would be in contact with each commissioner to arrange time to discuss each commissioner's areas of policy interest.

I-405 UPDATE

John Okamoto, Assistant Secretary for Northwest Washington, reviewed with the Commission the new department-wide organization chart and how it related to the new focus on delivering programs and projects. Dave Dye, Urban Corridors Administrator, informed the Commission that Mike Cummings, Urban Corridor Planning Supervisor, would report on the history and current status of the I-405 project, and Craig Stone, Urban Project Administrator, would report on future steps to be taken.

Mr. Cummings pointed out that I-405 is one of the most congested freeways in

the state, with up to twelve hours of gridlock experienced every day. He described the project organization, which includes participation from 35 agencies, 24 concurring organizations, five co-lead agencies and four legislators participating in the project. Mr. Cummings described the study area and the traffic congestion pattern by hours of congestion at several specific locations. The project will be issuing a draft EIS next week, which will also include a preliminary preferred alternative. Mr. Cummings indicated that the project committees evaluated four alternatives before arriving at a preliminary option. He described the basic components of the preliminary preferred alternative, which will include additional general-purpose lanes and increased transit and vanpool service, arterial improvements, improvements in the HOV system and freeway-to-freeway connections, and TDM/ITS investments to improve performance of the system. He also stated that there would be investments in environmental mitigation and enhancement. Mr. Cummings also showed the Commission specific improvements in sub-areas of the project, as examples of the kinds of improvements that were being proposed. He predicted that the improvements will accommodate an additional 110,000 trips per day, and reduce hours of congestion by 20%. Travel timesavings could reach an estimated \$500 million to \$600 million per year. In response to commissioner questions, Mr. Cummings indicated that the project alternatives were being developed to avoid simply shifting traffic off the freeway and onto the local arterials.

Mr. Stone briefed the Commission on the implementation strategies being developed for the I-405 project. The project team is meeting with departments of transportation from other states to learn how they managed their major projects. The project delivery strategy will be to leverage private sector expertise and workforce to the maximum possible, with oversight from a small Department of Transportation team. The Department will utilize both the lessons learned from other states, and from the very successful I-90 project here in Washington. The department and consultant teams will be co-located, and will work as one organization to accomplish the project. Mr. Stone indicated that the Executive Committee, with Commissioner Kargianis as Chair, would probably continue to provide advice and guidance on the project.

PUBLIC AND LEGISLATOR COMMENT PERIOD

No member of the public or Legislature requested time to address the Commission.

TACOMA NARROWS BRIDGE UPDATE

Jerry Ellis, Director, Transportation and Economic Partnerships, and Larry O'Bryon, Vice-President, United Infrastructure of Washington, provided the Commission with a progress report on the activities being conducted regarding the Tacoma Narrows Bridge project. The Commission, Ms. Ellis and Mr. O'Bryon, as well as Deborah Cade, Assistant Attorney General, then engaged in a question and answer period concerning the costs of and cost responsibility for the project.

BOND SALE REQUEST

Bill Starkey, Transportation Funds Manager, requested on behalf of the Department that the Commission delegate to Secretary MacDonald the authority to request that the State Finance Committee sell bonds to finance the appropriation of \$522,287,000 in the 2001-2003 Department budget. The bond sales will be requested at the times the revenue is needed to finance the projects listed in the attachment to the delegation resolution.

It was moved by Commissioner Niva and seconded by Commissioner Davis to approve Resolution 619, requesting the State Finance Committee to sell general obligation bonds at times and in the amounts requested by the Secretary of Transportation. The motion was approved unanimously.

RELIEVING CONGESTION THROUGH INCIDENT RESPONSE

Toby Rickman, State Traffic Engineer, provided an informational briefing to the Commission regarding the Department's efforts to relieve traffic congestion on freeways by removing incidents more rapidly using incident response teams and service patrols. He reported that the freeway system carries a much larger share of traffic than would be expected based only on the number of lane miles. He informed the Commission that the freeway system loses about half of its capacity due to incidents, and that better traffic management can expand the freeway's capacity. He pointed out that sixty percent of congestion is caused by incidents. He then briefed the Commission regarding the use of the fourteen incident response trucks positioned in the state, and the use of the service patrols in four specific zones in the Central Puget Sound. While incident response trucks wait to be called to respond to incidents, the service patrols are roving, to be able to respond more quickly. The service patrols are averaging 700 assists per month, responding to 68% of the incidents reported to the State Patrol. It is estimated that the service patrols saved 13,048 vehicle hours of delay per year, and reduced Department response time from 9.5 minutes to 3.7 minutes. Mr. Rickman then described a ten-point plan to improve the incident response and service patrol programs, including refocusing incident response truck service and having them act more like service patrols. Communications will be improved, better planning will be undertaken, and State Patrol investigations will be conducted in a shorter amount of time. The Department will also work with the Department of Ecology to improve response time to hazards materials spills. Tow-away zones will be evaluated, and dispatching of tow trucks will be improved. Mr. Rickman also indicated that a new roadway clearance policy regarding damaged loads would be implemented, service patrols would be increased, and legislation would be sought to approve a "steer it, clear it" policy, which will allow vehicles to be moved to the side of the road after an incident rather than waiting for an investigation.

COST RESPONSIBILITY STUDIES

Eric Meale, Manager, Economics Branch, provided an informational briefing to the

Commission regarding several cost responsibility studies conducted by the Federal Highway Administration and other states. He explained that highway cost responsibility studies seek to establish the relationship between vehicle class tax revenues and the highway program costs attributed to that vehicle class. He summarized the methodologies used in conducting cost responsibilities, which primarily involve determining the sources and amounts of revenue from each vehicle class, and the specific costs of highway construction and maintenance attributable to the characteristics of the particular vehicle classes. He pointed out that the results of cost responsibility studies would vary from one state to another, because of the different mix of revenue sources and program expenditures. Therefore, it is difficult to extrapolate from the findings of other studies to what would be the case for Washington State. Commissioner Kargianis expressed his concern that if the state is investing in facilities or improvements to existing facilities to improve freight movement, the Commission should understand the costs attributable to the trucks and whether the industry is contributing the appropriate amount of revenue in response. Commissioner Maher pointed out that different trucks have different impacts on the highway depending on their tire and axle configurations, even if they are the same size class, and so that has to be factored into the equation. Commissioner Marr suggested that the Commission might approach this issue in the development of the 03-05 biennial budget proposal.

PAVEMENT TYPE SELECTIONS – TOUR OF MATERIALS LAB

The Commission members received a tour and briefing of a bridge repair project on Capital Boulevard crossing Interstate 5, and of the Materials Laboratory, by several Department of Transportation employees

FOLLOWUP TO AUGUST 7TH COMMISSION RETREAT

The Commission reviewed the draft list of topics for the Commission's proposed Fiscal Year 2002 Agenda Work Plan, and determined that each commissioner would consider the topics and provide any additional comments to Mr. Rose by August 22nd.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m. on August 15, 2001.